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Mr. REDMOND'S VISIT TO THE FRONT.

AUTHORISED EDITION.

THOMAS NELSON & SONS,
35 and 36 Paternoster Row, London, E.C.
EDINBURGH. NEW YORK. PARIS.

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ACCOUNT
OF
A VISIT TO THE FRONT

BY
J. E. REDMOND, M.P.,
Chairman, Irish Parliamentary Party,

IN
NOVEMBER, 1915.

WITH A SPEECH DELIVERED BY
Mr. REDMOND
ON 23rd NOVEMBER, 1915.

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Mr. REDMOND'S VISIT TO THE FRONT.

I have been asked to publish in some detail a narrative of my experience and my impressions during my recent visit to the front. This is an extremely difficult thing to do with any completeness, and especially in view of the fact that I must be careful not to say anything which the censor might consider it injurious to publish.

I spent a week in the British, French, and Belgian lines. I inspected, in considerable detail, one of the British great military bases, and saw the elaborate arrangements for transport of troops, munitions, and provisions. I marvelled at the enormous hangars which had been built, and at the stupendous supply of all sorts of munitions which they contained, and at the arrangements made for their daily arrival at the port and their daily convoy to the various railheads, from whence they are taken on by motor lorry to the troops.

I visited the great base hospitals, with accommodation for thousands of wounded

soldiers, and with the beautiful and almost luxurious convalescent hospitals attached.

When I proceeded from the base to Headquarters, I had unique opportunities of investigating the extraordinary work of the Administrative Staff. I met the heads of all the various departments, including the Protestant and the Catholic Director-Generals of Chaplains with the troops, Monsignor Keating and Rev. Major-General Sims. I saw one of the flying stations with its hundreds of hangars and aircraft of all descriptions. I visited every Irish Regiment at the front. I saw John Ward's Navy battalions doing the most magnificent work in making and repairing of roads. I saw the Indian troops and the Canadian troops. To describe all these things with anything like detail would be quite impossible in the space at my disposal.

My best course, I think, will be to give something in the nature of a diary.

At the base, the Colonel-Commandant of the port, Colonel Wilberforce, son of the Rev. Canon Wilberforce, Chaplain to the Speaker,

was my guide, and I feel greatly indebted to him for his kindness.

When visiting the great hospitals, I had the pleasure of paying a visit to Lady Dudley, who has charge of the Australian hospital, and who has been there doing this noble work for the last fifteen months without a break.

One of my most interesting experiences was a visit to St. Patrick's Club for soldiers, which has been conducted by the Hon. Miss Florence Colburn, assisted by Miss Grace O'Malley, of London.

That night I arrived at General Headquarters, where I met General MacDonagh, Lieutenant Blennerhassett, and other Irishmen.

IRISHMEN EVERYWHERE.

From that time until I left the shores of France again I met Irishmen everywhere, and in every capacity, not merely in the Irish regiments, but in every regiment and high up in every single branch of the Service—Irishmen from north and south and east and west. In fact, it is true to say that from

the Irish Commander-in-Chief himself right down through the Army one meets Irishmen everywhere one goes.

The following day, November 18th, we left General Headquarters at 8 o'clock in the morning, under the guidance of Major Elles, and motored to visit the First Army. En route we passed the 59th Rifles of the Indian Army and a battalion of Indian Cavalry, splendid men, but looking somewhat chilled in the, to them, unaccustomed cold and rain. All along the route we passed miles and miles of supply and ammunition columns and battalions going to or coming from the trenches.

On arrival at the Headquarters of the First Army, we met General Sir Douglas Haig, the Commanding Officer, and had an opportunity of examining the extraordinary methods of the Intelligence Department of the General Staff of the First Army, under the control of Lieut-Col. Charteris.

By the aid of aeroplane photography, our Army is in possession from day to day of elaborate photographs of German trenches, and I was shown the daily map which is issued on

which is plainly marked every portion of the whole intricate system of German trenches, and on which is also marked the position of every German battery behind their lines.

Proceeding from thence to —, we were received by Brigadier-General Crampton, commanding No. 1 Heavy Artillery Reserve Group. We were shown the 9.2 Naval gun, mounted on a railway truck, specially constructed for the purpose, which can be moved up and down the line wherever the line may be made; and also a 12-inch howitzer, both enormous and forbidden-looking engines of war.

In company with General Crampton we then proceeded to —, where we met Lieut.-General Sir Henry Rawlinson, Bart., commanding the 4th Army Corps, and Major-General Holland, commanding the 1st Division.

A SPEECH UNDER FIRE.

Here the Munster Fusiliers were paraded and drawn up in a hollow square, and Major-General Rawlinson introduced me to the troops and asked me to address them. They had

marched on to the ground playing the "Wearing of the Green" on their band of Irish war-pipes, and carrying a green Irish flag.

There was a battery of British anti-aircraft guns on my left, about forty yards away, and a battery of 75mm. French guns about forty yards on my right.

After I had spoken a few sentences, the battery on my left rang out with startling suddenness, and we then became aware that there was a hostile German Taube aeroplane right over our heads.

From that on until the end of my speech the British guns on the one side and the French guns on the other fired shrapnel shells at the Taube at regular intervals. It was a strange experience for me to have my speech punctuated, not by applause, but by the roar of guns situated only a few yards from where I was standing.

It was a marvellous exhibition of the discipline and steadiness of the men that, while this firing was taking place, not one of them even lifted his head to look in the sky at the

aeroplane, but remained absolutely passive at attention.

When I finished my speech, the men cheered lustily, and marched away playing "O'Donnell Abboo."

At the commencement of the war the men had five green flags. Now they have only one, and I promised to supply the deficiency.

We remained upon the field for some twenty minutes after, watching the battle between the guns and the Taube. Four British aircraft were sent up to aid in the attack. Shrapnel shells were bursting all round the Taube in such a way that it seemed absolutely impossible for it to escape being hit, and I am quite certain that it was hit, but not vitally: and, after wheeling over our heads more than once, as if in defiance, the Taube slowly disappeared towards the German lines.

The French 75mm. gun is certainly a beautiful weapon, if one can use such a phrase about any engine of war. It works with such ease, its construction is so simple, and it is so light and easy to move, that it is a marvel. It

can, I believe, fire 20 rounds a minute. It can be used as an anti-aircraft gun, and immediately afterwards it can be used as an ordinary field gun. The British anti-aircraft gun, on the contrary, though I am sure it is a magnificent weapon, is ugly in the extreme, and cannot be used as an ordinary field gun. The French gun was painted blue, and was worked by a battery of French soldiers in their picturesque new light blue uniforms and blue steel helmets.

Subsequently, we walked to a battery of two 9.2 British naval guns, enormous monsters, which were trained on a building just behind the German lines, about three miles distant. These guns have a range of over 10 miles.

FIRING A HUGE GUN.

I was given the privilege of firing one of these huge guns at its object. The experience was rather a trying one, and I only hope my shot went home.

During lunch at Divisional Headquarters the band played Irish National airs, and at intervals the house was shaken by guns from a battery quite close, and a large French

window in the room where we were lunching was blown in by the concussion.

We then went to visit the battlefield of Loos, which is a flat plain, the only eminences being a series of fosses, some eight in number, which really are big conical-shaped heaps of slack and cinders formed in connection with the mining operations of the district. These fosses, with the exception of Fosse 8, are all in the British possession since the battle of Loos.

We ascended one of the highest of them, a height of about 200 feet, which we reached by an underground passage through which we had almost to crawl on all fours. When we reached the top we found we had a complete view of the plain of the battlefield of Loos, with Loos itself in the distance. We saw the German lines winding along like a snake, and our lines nearer to us.

The following day, that is the 19th November, making another early start and under the guidance of Major Heywood, we went to the Headquarters of the Second Army, where we were received by General Plummer, the

Army Commander, and where again were exhibited the war maps, aeroplane photographs, &c.

We proceeded then to the Headquarters of the 24th Division (General Capper). Here the Second Battalion of the Leinster Regiment, with General Jelf commanding the 73rd Infantry Brigade, were paraded to meet us.

They first gave us a display of bombing, and fired volleys of various kinds of bombs, and explained to us this mode of trench warfare. The bombs are of all shapes and sizes, some of them resembling cricket balls in appearance, some of them the shape of a hair-brush with a handle, and some of them in the nature of slings with canvas ribbons attached to them.

ADDRESS TO LEINSTERS.

After this display, I was given the privilege of addressing the Leinsters, and received from them a most enthusiastic reception. Their band of Irish war-pipes played the "Wearin' of the Green," and "Garryowen."

I had the pleasure here of meeting the two Catholic Chaplains, Father Higgins, a Sligo

man, and Father Brown, a Cork man. Like all the other Chaplains whom I met at the front, they spoke in the highest praise of the extraordinary spirit of the men, their good behaviour and their devotion to their religious duties.

All the time we were in this camp shelling and big-gun firing from both the British and German lines was continuous.

We proceeded then through Armentières, which had been heavily shelled the day before, to the 25th Divisional Headquarters. Here we were met by General Doran, an Irishman and a Wexford man, from whom we received a hearty welcome.

We proceeded then to the famous Plug Street Wood. This has been the scene of, perhaps, the heaviest fighting in the war. It is now one mass of barbed wire entanglements, and is certainly impregnable.

We walked for about a mile and a half through the three lines of defence until we arrived at the firing line, along which we walked and saw the soldiers in their huts and

dugouts, and walking about in the trenches. Most of the trenches were supplied with periscopes, and we were within about 80 yards of the firing line of the Germans, which we saw distinctly.

Although nothing which could be termed an attack was proceeding, the roar of the guns was continuous, and there was scarcely any cessation from rifle fire and from machine gun fire of varying intensity.

While we were there a man behind us in the woods, who turned out, sadly enough, to have been a Waterford man, and a constituent of mine, was struck by a stray bullet and instantly killed.

THE SOLDIERS' GRAVEYARD.

One of the most pathetic sights in this wood was the soldiers' graveyard, which looked as if thousands of soldiers had been buried in it, each grave tastefully dressed, with a plain cross with the name of the man and the date of his death, most of them having wild flowers and bits of ribbon attached, and some of them with the poor fellow's cap hanging on the top of the cross.

We remained about an hour in the front firing trench.

Enormous improvements have been made in the trenches since last winter. Most of them have boarded floors; others of them have brick floors; and although in really wet weather it is impossible to prevent them turning into a morass of mud and water, at the same time it is comparatively easy in fairly fine weather to clear them. They have got a system of trench pumps which are used to get rid of the water; and I was greatly impressed by the pipes which I saw running a mile and a half back from the front of the trench, supplying drinking water to the men.

The dugouts which I saw were comparatively comfortable. The men had rough beds to lie on; many containing tables. One dugout I saw had four panes of glass in it, making a little window. Many of them also had small braziers with fires.

I was told that one of the most valued presents which the men received are boxes of nightlights, which they are allowed to burn in their dugouts.

This year the men have been served out with long indiarubber boots, which go right up over their thighs like fishing waders. The organisation in connection with these boots is perfect. When a battalion of men is coming to the trenches, it finds in the supporting lines—that is to say, in the second line of trenches—these boots waiting for them. They remove their own boots, get an extra pair of thick stockings, and put on the rubber boots. When they are coming away after their four days in the trenches they leave these boots at the same station, and receive their own boots and socks, which have been dried for them in the meantime.

And to see the extraordinary care that is taken of the men! When they get back to their camp the men are taken to an enormous wash-house, where they strip naked, and their mud-coated uniforms and their underclothes are taken from them into another department, where they are washed, brushed, and thoroughly disinfected. The men go through a door into an enormous wash-house, where there are great circular vats of warm water waiting for them, and twelve men at a time, each with a piece of soap, jump in

It was a strange sight to see these big fellows, after their four days in the trenches, playing about in the steaming water like so many schoolboys.

When they have had their bath they go into another room, where they find a complete fresh suit of underclothes, and also find clean and dry tunics, pants, and puttees, socks and boots.

THE PRINCE OF WALES.

The Prince of Wales bathes in one of these wash-houses with the men, the only distinction being that he has a separate bath to himself.

They have also a barber's shop. They are supplied with leather waistcoats and with sheepskin or goatskin coats, and with the best of gloves and mufflers; and it would be impossible for me to convey an adequate idea of the care that is taken of these brave fellows in every possible respect—and, God knows, they are worthy of it all. Some of the men in the bath were wearing scapulars.

I had the pleasure of meeting here the Catholic Chaplains, Fathers Hagerty and Cullan.

The town of Plug Street itself is in ruins, and the beautiful church utterly destroyed.

Just outside we visited the camp of the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles. The men, who were paraded, were just about to start for the trenches; they had all their equipment on, and, indeed, seemed heavily laden.

Father Gill, S.J., their Chaplain, was at their head, and was going to march in for his four days in the trenches with them.

I had a warm welcome from them, and when I reminded them that their regiment was composed of men from the North of Ireland and from the South combined, they heartily cheered; and I was told that the Belfast men and the Southern and Western men in the regiment were the best of comrades and of friends.

On our way back to General Headquarters we called to see General Seely, at —, and found him enthusiastic in praise of the Brigade

of Canadian cavalry that he commands. He, as all the Commanding Officers I met, was living in a simple billet, in a small house without carpets or luxuries of any kind, and was the same cheery, gallant fellow we all knew so well.

The following day—Saturday, the 20th November—we left Headquarters again at a very early hour, again under the guidance of Major Elles, in order to visit the old 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers (the Faugh-a-Ballaghs) and the Dublin Fusiliers.

On our way we passed a battalion of the French Algerian troops—most picturesque figures. They made a brave show on their beautiful Arab ponies.

Brigadier-General Hull met us here, and I was invited to address the combined battalions of the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the Dublin Fusiliers, and received from them a thoroughly hearty greeting.

After my speech, the battalions left the ground playing “O'Donnell Aboo,” followed by “God Save Ireland,” their cheers echoing away through the woods.

18TH ROYAL IRISH REGIMENT.

From this we went on to meet the old 18th Royal Irish Regiment, the senior of all the Irish regiments. Though they had just come from the trenches they had cleaned and smartened themselves up and presented a magnificent spectacle of trained men. They gave me an enthusiastic reception.

The night before, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir John French, had asked me to convey a message of congratulation to this regiment for their gallantry in the field, and to assure them how proud he was to be their Colonel. Many of the men were from Wexford, and I need not say I was glad to meet my fellow-Wexfordmen, and also many of my own constituents from Waterford.

It has been claimed for this regiment that it was the first which made "It's a long way to Tipperary" so popular with the troops. I am told this song is sung by both the Belgian and French troops, and that its strains are even heard coming from the German trenches.

Father Fitzmorris, the Chaplain, met us with his men.

While we were at lunch subsequently at Headquarters two batteries of British guns in our immediate vicinity commenced a hot fire on the German lines, so much so that the little house in which we were sitting was shaking the whole time, the panes of glass were rattling, and the noise was so great that it was practically impossible to converse.

After lunch General Hull conducted us to what I regard as the most dangerous part of the firing line that I have visited. The day was foggy, and General Hull considered that it would be safe for us to proceed in a motor a portion of the way. He would, however, allow only one motor and a limited number of people to go.

Leaving the motor by the side of the road, we entered a long communication trench, and passed on through the supporting trenches for a couple of miles. The whole time guns were booming without cessation, and the ground on each side showed great craters which had been made by shells. When we reached the actual

firing trench we were within a very short distance of the German trenches, which we saw with the utmost distinctness.

THE DUBLINS AND ULSTERS.

Here I met the Dublin Fusiliers and the men of a battalion of the Ulster Division (the Royal Irish Rifles) side by side in the trenches.

The next day, Sunday, 21st November, we paid a visit to the newly-formed Guards' Division, commanded by Lord Cavan.

Lord Cavan is one of the heroes of this war, and I heard everywhere I went enthusiastic praise of his qualities as a soldier and a man, and from my own observation I am certain that his men would follow him anywhere to the death.

At the Headquarters we met Lord Claud Hamilton and the Prince of Wales. The latter seemed in first rate health and spirits. He leads exactly the same life as any other young subaltern in the army. I could not help thinking what a magnificent training it is for him. He seems perfectly happy.

The first and second battalions of the Irish Guards were paraded and inspected by us, in company with Lord Cavan. I met many men in the regiment, both amongst the officers and the rank and file, whom I knew. One a Sergeant Murphy from Enniscorthy, and another Private M'Veagh, from Co. Antrim, had just obtained the D.S.O. for gallantry at Loos.

The first battalion is commanded by Colonel M'Calmont, M.P., who was exceedingly cordial in his welcome, and the second battalion by Colonel Butler.

The men are all giants, and what struck me was the uniformity of the height of the men. It is not to be found in any other regiment which I saw.

They were all in the best of spirits, and seemed delighted by my visit.

I was told by the Catholic Chaplain that all the men had been at Communion on the Friday before.

FATHER GWYNN'S DEATH.

The deepest grief is felt by them all at the tragic death of their Chaplain, Father Gwynn.

Lord Cavan and the officers described him to me as a splendid fellow, who had been a tower of strength and a continual tonic to the regiment.

They deeply regret his death.

The son of Mr. Hugh Law, M.P., was one of the officers who received us.

After the parade we proceeded to some batteries of 4.5 howitzers, 18-pounders, and 9.2 howitzers, which were about to open fire upon certain houses behind the German lines, which had been suspected of harbouring enemy guns.

The officer in charge was Captain Darcy, of Galway.

As soon as we arrived the bombardment commenced, and was exceedingly exciting work. After each shot a telephone message instantly came back as to the result. The first few shots were misses, and the correction in the range was made in accordance with the telephone message. Finally, the word came—a hit. Then they knew the range to absolute accuracy, and all the guns were turned on,

and in a few moments the buildings on which they were firing were completely demolished.

On Monday, 22nd November, we went to Belgium, driving along by the Belgian canals, and were deeply impressed with the spectacle of women pulling enormous canal barges twice the size of those we are accustomed to in this country. Everywhere the women were doing agricultural work in the fields. No men were to be seen at all except the troops who crowded the roads.

On reaching the Belgian frontier I had a strange experience. I had left the British Headquarters without the necessary permit to cross the Belgian lines, and we were held up by the Belgian sentries. We showed our papers, we explained we were going as guests to visit King Albert, we said we came from Sir John French. All in vain; we could not proceed. At last a Belgian officer arrived, and we suggested to him to send an armed guard with us to the Belgian Headquarters, and to this he agreed, and a soldier, with rifle and fixed bayonet, was put next our chauffeur and thus we drove to Le Panne, where the King resides. On our arrival we

found the British Minister at King Albert's Court and two Belgian aides-de-camp waiting for us, and our guard was relieved of his duty.

RUINED VILLAGES AND TOWNS.

We passed through villages and towns lying in absolute ruins. Some of the most beautiful buildings in Europe, going back for many hundreds of years, and which were regarded as models of architecture, were riddled or completely demolished. In these towns the churches in every case suffered most. In many towns we passed through there was not a living human being, except a few Belgian guards who were living in cellars. In Pervyse, in a half-ruined two-storey house in the middle of universal ruin, we found two English ladies were living. One of them is a Miss Chisholme, and they have remained there all through the war, tending the wounded and succouring the starving children of the remnant population. By the same kind of extraordinary coincidence as that whereby crucifixes and statues have escaped destruction in Belgium, so the portion of the little house which these ladies have inhabited to this time

has remained untouched. It is not surprising that the Belgian people look upon them with a sort of supernatural and sacred love.

At Nieuport, the largest town in the neighbourhood, the remains of the Cathedral had been bombarded the day before we arrived, and, while we were there, an English aeroplane was passing over the town when at once it was attacked by shells from the German trenches, which were comparatively near, and we saw fighting going on between them lasting a considerable time. In the end our aeroplane got away unscathed.

We had an unpleasant reminder of the continual danger, even on the quietest day in areas of this kind, when a bullet whizzed past us and flattened itself on a wall a few yards from where we were walking.

ABSOLUTELY IMPREGNABLE DEFENCE.

We then were driven to the front Belgian firing trench, a portion of which is an absolute impregnable defence, having in front vast sheets of water, where the country has been inundated by the inhabitants themselves and

where no Army could advance against them. The warfare here consists simply of sniping and shell fire from behind. Other portions of the trench are quite near the German trenches. Continual sniping goes on and shells are always booming. The men seemed quite cheerful, and though not as comfortable looking as the English troops, still were in good heart, and quite determined, apparently, to see this matter through.

From the trenches we drove quite a short distance to the seashore, where we were received by the English Minister at the Belgian Court, General Bridges, and his staff, amongst whom we found Prince Alexander of Teck.

I had been informed before leaving the British Headquarters that King Albert had graciously expressed a desire to see me, and I therefore proceeded to his residence.

VISIT TO KING ALBERT.

A small, unpretending, detached seaside villa, without garden or grounds of any sort or kind, standing literally on a sandhill, looking out to the sea, and only about thirty or forty feet from the edge of the water, is the Royal

Palace—I shall never forget my visit to the King, his kindness, his courtesy, and his sympathy, and how warmly and generously he spoke of the little that Ireland had been able to do to help him. I confess that my emotions were stirred by this interview, more perhaps than ever before.

After the interview we started to pay a visit to Ypres, but were overtaken by a dense fog, and were unable, to our great regret, to get to the most shelled town in Belgium; indeed, it took us five hours crawling slowly and cautiously along the road, in and out between marching troops and transport waggons, which loomed up out of the mist constantly all round us wherever we went, to reach at last General Headquarters, late at night.

The following day, Tuesday, November 23rd, I was enabled to return to London on a troopship, carrying 1,400 men and officers coming home on leave, and I was thus enabled to be in time to address the meeting that same evening in the Queen's Hall, London.

Throughout my visit I received the greatest courtesy and kindness from everyone, and I

am especially indebted to Sir John French and those officers who so kindly escorted me on my tour. I had the pleasure of meeting at General Headquarters, Major Winston Churchill, who has been attached to the Guards' Division, and who had gone to the trenches for the first time on the day I visited the Irish Guards.

I found, as I have already stated in public, universal confidence at the front—universal confidence in the power of the Allies to smash the Germans on the western line; universal indignation at the slanders which have been current in London with reference to the Headquarters of the Administrative Staff; and I would like to say universal confidence in the Commander-in-Chief, Sir John French.

MR. REDMOND'S SPEECH,

23RD NOVEMBER, 1915.

Major Kemmitt, ladies, and gentlemen.—When I was invited some weeks ago to address a meeting in support of the London Irish Regiment I gladly accepted the invitation, and I have for some time been looking forward with the greatest pleasure to this occasion, but events so fell out that at the last moment I was very nearly being prevented from being present here to-night, and I could not have been present at this time were it not that I was given the privilege of coming this afternoon from France in a troopship. I have just concluded a visit to the French, British, and Belgian lines. I have just finished the most interesting, and most thrilling, and the proudest week of my life. (Cheers.) The week has been so crowded with incidents, so full of blended pathos and pride, so full of intermixed tragedy and glory, I feel it impossible for me at a moment's notice to speak at any length of my experiences or of the impressions that I have brought back. I hope that in a day or two it will be possible for me to give to the public something in the nature

of a connected narrative. All I can do to-night is to allude shortly to two or three of the outstanding facts which I feel I ought instantly to discuss and to state. First of all, the one great impression that I have brought back from the front is the absolute confidence of our troops. (Cheers.) There are no pessimists at the front. (Cheers.) From the Commander-in-Chief down through all the ranks in the army there is but one feeling of absolute confidence in the result of this war, and I take leave to say from my experience there that there is a universal feeling of resentment against those people in this country who are spreading the spirit of pessimism. (Cheers.) It had been said to me over and over again, "Why is not the 'all is lost brigade' sent to the front?" The one remedy for any man who is depressed or despondent is to go and meet the troops at the front.

GERMANY BEATEN ON WESTERN FRONT.

The real truth of the matter is this, so far as the western front is concerned, Germany is beaten. (Cheers.) Every day, every hour she is getting weaker on the front and we are

getting stronger. For every shell the Germans fire in a day we fire five—(cheers)—and anybody who would attempt to preach pessimism in the English, French, or Belgian lines to-day would get a very uncomfortable reception. The second great broad impression that I have brought back from my visit is the amazing character of the organisation. None can understand that great army of a million men and more who has not seen something of it. We wonder how the £4,000,000 or £5,000,000 a day are spent. A visit to the front is an education. It is a great revelation of that. I did not know much about military matters; still I thought I had an intelligent knowledge, speaking generally, about these affairs. I found that I was in a state of profound ignorance. Anything more amazing than the spectacle of the organisation of the English army cannot be conceived. I drove hour by hour through miles and miles of motor lorries, carrying ammunition, food, and stores of all sorts, going from the base to the front regularly, backwards and forwards, like clockwork, without a hitch of any sort or kind, bringing to the base enormous stores of every sort. The organisation is perfect in every possible

respect. The transport of the commissariat, the clothing, the ammunition, goes on daily like clockwork. The medical organisation is equally amazing. A few yards behind the firing trench is the first-aid hospital, or shed. There is the doctor, and there also is the priest or the clergyman. From there the wounded man is brought a little further back, and he finds the ambulance. He goes in the ambulance straight away to the clearing hospital, and in cases that are not too bad for the transport it is true to say that in something like seven or eight hours the wounded soldier may be back here in London. The really serious cases will go to the great hospitals at the base. I went through a number of these hospitals, and anything more perfect it is impossible to conceive; and I am quite sure of this—that no army in the field in the whole history of war ever had a more perfect medical organisation. (Cheers.)

THE RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION.

So also of the religious organisation. Ah! war is a terrible thing, and it brings out many brutal acts; but war also very often brings

out all that is best in a man. No one could go as I did and see the Catholic chaplains and the Protestant and Presbyterian chaplains working side by side—(cheers)—with true spirit of Christian brotherhood, no one could witness as I did the wave of religious emotion and enthusiasm which sways the troops of all religions, without admitting that, with all its horrors, war does bring out something that is noble in human nature. The priests and the clergymen are doing the noblest work; and many of the generals and commanders to whom I spoke said that, even apart altogether from the religious ministrations of these men, that each one of them was a tower of strength, a tonic of the greatest benefit, to the regiment to which he was attached—(cheers)—and that they were invaluable. Many of them I know have given their lives. There is not a day at any part of the firing trenches where these true Christian clergymen of various denominations are not to be found. Therefore, I say that the religious organisation also is perfect. I mixed freely with the men in the front firing line and the supporting line, and all along through France and Belgium I saw the men cheery, confident, well clad, healthy and fit in appearance, and I

came away with the conclusion that no army in the history of the world was ever better looked after and cared for than our army in the field at this moment. (Cheers.)

The great work of organisation—amazing when you come to think that it deals with over a million men—is the work of the administrative staff. I have been a witness of the work of this administrative staff. These men are at work before 9 o'clock in the morning. They go on with their work even after dinner up to 10 and 11 o'clock at night. They are the hardest-worked men I have ever come across. So far from being shirkers, almost all the young men who are employed on the staff are men who have already served in this war and have been wounded, and severely wounded. I met some of them and I inquired who they were, and I found that they were, some of them, men who had been shot through both lungs, nine months ago, who had recovered from their wounds, and who, instead of being sent back to the front, had been allotted to headquarters for the purpose of doing this work, and I found that they were men, as I have said, who were working from 9 o'clock in the morning until 10 or 11 o'clock at night.

Now, my object in going to the front was to pay a visit to the Irish regiments. I had the honour of meeting and speaking to every Irish regiment at the front, with one exception. I had to give up the privilege of addressing them in order to have the privilege of addressing you. I found the Irish regiments full of confidence, full of cheerfulness, full of fight. (Cheers.) In most cases they marched on to parade to hear my remarks, headed by a pipers' band, like you had here this evening, playing "O'Donnell Abu" or "God Save Ireland." They carried with them the green flag of Ireland. (Cheers.)

"ONE THING THAT TOUCHED ME."

I not only met them on parade, but I met them in the trenches, and let me tell you one thing that touched me and filled my heart with hope. In one part of the firing trenches I went into I found a battalion of the Ulster Division from Belfast side by side with the Dublins. (Cheers.) I spoke to them all. I found that so far from any friction having arisen between them they were there like true comrades and brother Irishmen. (Cheers.)

I pray God that may go on. I pray that whenever a battalion of the Irish Brigade goes into action there may be a battalion of the Ulster Division alongside of them. (Cheers.) I need not point the moral to you. That is the way to end the unhappiness and the discords and the confusion of Ireland. (Cheers.) Let Irishmen come together in the trenches and risk their lives together and spill their blood together and I say there is no power on earth that when they come home can induce them to turn as enemies one upon another. (Cheers.) The chief complaint I have to make in reference to these Irish regiments is that they do not get sufficient official recognition in the despatches. (Hear, hear.) At the front their deeds are the theme of every tongue from the Commander-in-Chief down; but if you were to judge by the official despatches, they have done nothing very remarkable, and I do venture to-night to repeat the appeal I made recently in the House of Commons that when any regiment—English, Irish, Scotch, or Welsh—does something particularly gallant there ought to be official recognition of the fact. (Cheers.)

THE LONDON IRISH REGIMENT.

Take the case of the London Irish. Their gallantry at the battle of Loos I found to be the theme of every tongue at the front. Every General and every Commanding Officer I spoke to spoke to me about what they had done. They were the first into the village of Loos. They captured five guns there. They made victory certain, and they commenced a charge by bringing out a football and dribbling it along. (Cheers and laughter.) It is hard to bear when one finds in the official despatch this regiment simply described as "a certain Territorial Regiment." God knows I do not grudge honour and glory to brave men of any regiment, but when the London Irish do things like this, should the fact be kept back from the public and the regiment be simply described as "a certain Territorial Regiment?" (Cheers.) The same thing applies, as I said, to every English and Scotch and Welsh regiment, but I take the Irish case because it touches me nearest. I made representations at Headquarters in France. I have already made representations in the House of Commons, and I do to-night venture to make an appeal that credit should be

given to each regiment for what it has done, being convinced in my own heart that such recognition will have a magnificent effect upon the whole morale of the regiment, and that it will have a magnificent effect upon the future of recruiting. It is a great regret to me that I was unable to meet on parade and speak to the London Irish Regiment. When I expressed a wish to meet the Irish regiments, it was understood that I meant Irish regiments raised in Ireland. When I got to France I found that a programme had been drawn up which was handed to me of all my movements for each day. I was told I was under military discipline, and that that programme must not be altered, and indeed I recognised that to alter any of the items of the programme of each day would be to entail inconvenience on many people who, in one district or another, had kind and hospitable arrangements made for my reception. Therefore I felt bound to follow the programme. All I could see of the London Irish was in driving through the Division to which they belong, when they were lined up on the road, and when I had the gratification of being saluted by many who seemed to recognise me. Well, I have come here to-night to try and do a

good turn for that regiment. It is a great Irish regiment, with a history and a record. It is as much, or ought to be as much an Irish regiment as the Munsters or the Dublins, or the Connaughts, and I come here to-night to appeal to Irishmen in the Metropolis to come in and fill the ranks of this battalion, so that they may be able to come to the aid of the battalion in the field. Yesterday I spent in Belgium. I never in my life felt so thrilled by pity and indignation. I went along the Belgian firing lines, and I looked out and saw in one direction an inland sea of water, where the people had opened the flood gates and inundated their own land in order to protect themselves. The water is blackish, and I was told by many Belgians there that it will be 10 years after the end of the war before that land can be properly cultivated again. I then drove where the water was not, for miles through villages and towns, without a single civilian inhabitant. In some of these towns are a few Belgian soldiers living in cellars. There is not a building standing. Such a scene of desolation and horror you cannot conceive—churches battered to the ground, and what perhaps would touch us more,

nearly every house battered down. To go down the centre of the street you have to climb over heaps of débris from the walls of broken furniture, broken bedsteads, statues of the Virgin and Our Lord, all the poor little utensils and household goods of these people all in one great mass of ruin and confusion. And the bombardment still goes on. In one of these, the town of Nieuport, a flourishing fashionable seaside resort up to the time of the war and where there is not a single civilian inhabitant at present, the day before we went there the shelling had been renewed. What military object is served by this I do not know.

THE DEVASTATION OF BELGIUM.

But there is just one portion of the cathedral, going back in history for hundreds of years, one small portion of one tower that was still standing, and the Germans, the day before I went there, battered that down. I had been reading in the papers before I went out a number of stories about crucifixes and holy statues miraculously escaping. I did not pay much attention to these stories until I went out.

But I saw in this particular cathedral, although the walls of the cathedral itself to-day don't stand more than about 12 feet high, and the tower is gone, yet just outside of what used to be the front door of this enormous cathedral, there is standing still a pillar about 14 feet high, and the crucifix is upon that pillar. All round, wherever the eye can reach, there is nothing but ruin and desolation, but there is not a scratch upon that pillar or upon that crucifix. It is an extraordinary sight. There the crucifix was standing with the ruined church behind, and all around absolute desolation and solitude and wretchedness. It looked like a new Calvary. No man could see that without being profoundly touched. And then to finish the picture, I was brought to be presented to the King of the Belgians. (Loud cheers.) There is no more heroic figure, and I think that I may say, no more tragic figure in the world to-day, or, perhaps, it would not be too much to say, in the pages of history. He is a man magnificent in physique, in the bloom of his manhood, living for the last 15 months in a little detached villa on the sands, within about 30 feet of the sea, and facing out on to the grey melancholy waters,

right in the shell area, with shells falling all round him from time to time. There he stands alone with a kingdom 25 miles long and only 10 miles deep, with the remnant of his people in the trenches. He spends his time entirely in the trenches, or in riding about the lines, or in looking out across the sea into the immeasurable future for some hope for his country and for his people. But not one quaver in his heart or in his mind. There he stands, and he will stand, whatever the result may be, for the independence of his country and the rights of his people. (Cheers.)

SPEAKING FOR IRELAND.

I told him that I could speak on this question for Ireland—that Ireland was poor and weak, but that still Ireland was determined at any cost and at any sacrifice, to stand by the independence of the Belgian nation. He graciously expressed his sense of gratitude for the actions of Ireland. He told me that he was familiar with the connected history of Belgium and Ireland. He told me that all through the war he had noted with the deepest gratitude the sympathy of Ireland, and he said with

emotion to me that nothing had touched him more than the spectacle of the poor Irish people in every little parish in Ireland subscribing money for the Belgian refugees, and he said: "I have even been told that little Irish children have subscribed money." He asked me to take back to the Irish people an expression of his sympathy, his good will, and gratitude, and I ended the interview by assuring him that come weal or woe, no matter what happened, so far as it rested with us in Ireland, we would have no peace which had not as its first condition the rehabilitation of the independence of Belgium. (Cheers.)

A MESSAGE TO IRELAND.

Let me conclude. I brought back from the Irish troops a message to Ireland. I told them that I brought them from Ireland a message of sympathy and strength and encouragement. They asked me to bring back a message to Ireland. It was that they felt, every man of them, that in this war they were fighting not merely for the historic principles of liberty and right, not merely to avenge Belgium, but that they were fighting for the freedom and prosperity of their own beloved island—(cheers)—

and all they ask is that Ireland will stand by them. Ireland has sent them to the front. Ireland's duty is to stand by them, and what I will say to the Irish people is that Ireland for ever would be disgraced in the history of the world if, having sent these men to the front, she did not raise the necessary reserves to fill every gap that may arise in their ranks. I bring these disconnected remarks to an end. I feel that my experience would justify me in delivering a connected and prepared statement of what I saw and heard. That I cannot do to-night. It is only a little over two hours since I landed. But I came here full of these thoughts, and perhaps what I have said about my experience in France may prove to Major Kemmitt to be not a bad recruiting speech for you. I want to help this regiment in every way I can, and if by showing what is going on in France I stir a chord in the heart of any man to induce him to come and join this battalion, I will indeed be grateful.

AN APPEAL TO YOUNG MEN.

I do appeal to all these young men who may be here, and to the young men outside to whom

they can convey what they have heard here. I do earnestly appeal for the honour of their country, for the freedom of their country, and for the prosperity of their country, to join this regiment, so as to have some act or part in repelling the greatest attack upon civilisation that has ever been made, so that in future they may be able to say—"when religion, when liberty, when civilisation were at stake I did my duty, and I shall be able to hand down to my son a proud recollection of his father's courage and determination." (Cheers.)





